

**BOE Community Forum testimony**  
**On behalf of the Downcounty Consortium (DCC)**  
**October 15, 2009**

Speaker: **Sally Taber**, Area Vice President for Blair, Einstein, Northwood & Kennedy Clusters and member of the MCCPTA DCC Committee.

Good evening. Tonight I am speaking on behalf of the five clusters, which make up the Downcounty Consortium---Blair, Einstein, Northwood, Kennedy and Wheaton—and the cluster coordinators and PTA leaders with whom we work. We know that MCPS, Montgomery County, Maryland and our federal government are facing even tougher fiscal issues this year and we appreciate this opportunity to give you our input.

First, we thank the BOE and MCPS for continuing to fund staff and resources for the academic intervention programs, in our elementary, middle and high schools. This assistance needs to continue, as we can not ignore our struggling students when budgets are tight. This is particularly important in our high schools, so that struggling students receive the necessary assistance in order to pass their HSAs and be able to graduate. We thank our many dedicated high school staff, administrators and volunteers, who worked so hard last year and continue to do so this year, so that our students can be successful.

This year the task will be harder for our schools, because they lost the Algebra Lead Teacher and Literacy Coach staff positions. Our schools used these staff to focus on students who were struggling academically and needed help in order to pass the HSAs.

Academic intervention resources also need to be targeted at our middle schools, so that students are prepared for high school level work. We know that the reform efforts at the middle school level have targeted these students, and we need to continue this focus by using effective programs and resources to work with these students.

Second, we are very concerned about how the budget cutbacks are affecting our high school academies in the DCC. This year the academy coordinators at each high school may be teaching up to three classes plus doing all of the overall administration, outreach and planning necessary for the academy programs at their school. The heads of each academy carry a full teaching load, which allows little time for them to develop their programs, do outreach, find internships for students, plan field trips, and meet with their staff. We are concerned that this lack of planning and administration time will lead to weaker programs, which will not attract or maintain the interest of our students. In addition, the modernization of Wheaton High School needs to stay on schedule so that the school can continue to attract students.

Currently, three DCC schools have identified “special programs” which are listed on the MCPS website at:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/specialprograms/high/index.shtm>.

However, there are no special programs listed for Wheaton and Northwood High

Schools, even though Wheaton has the highly acclaimed Project Lead the Way program and Northwood recently added a Musical Theater program, which is attracting students from throughout the DCC. The simple addition of highlighting these programs on the “special programs” page under their schools would heighten their visibility and these schools to potential students.

Finally, MCPS needs to continue to put resources and staff into communicating with our non-English-speaking families. It is not enough to target the parents of our ESOL students—we also need staff who can work with the non-English speaking families of students who are not in ESOL. We know that this one-on-one interaction is effective and as our non-English speaking families continue to grow, we can not afford to leave them out of the home-school communication loop.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues and we look forward to working with you on maintaining and improving our educational programs for ALL students even in tough budget times.